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Sharing the joy

On Europe's biggest construction site at Hinkley Point C near Bridgwater, around 15,000 people from across the world work alongside one another and Christmas offers a chance to bring people of all faiths and none together.

Teams have the opportunity to take part in a Christmas tree competition with the entries being displayed on work platforms across the site. Local primary school choirs are invited to come in to sing Christmas songs and a choir from Romania will sing at the planned onsite Christmas Carol service which is open to any of the workers who want to come along.

Mary Payne, Lead Chaplain for the Hinkley Point C Project, says, "The tree competition and celebrations help to bring the hope of Christmas into the workplace, giving us a chance to share the joy of the season with the workforce, many of whom are working away from home."

At St Peter's Church, Draycott, they're gearing up for their Christmas Tree Festival. Local businesses, community groups, and schools are invited to decorate trees to be displayed inside the church.



The trees reflect the lives and work of the people who decorate them, bringing something of the community into the church.

Revd Thea Oliver, Associate Priest in Draycott, says, "The festival is another way for us to connect with our community. Everyone is welcome, whether they come to decorate a tree, enjoy the displays, have a chat or take some time to sit and pray."

At Christmas, we celebrate God's love for us, shown in Jesus coming to live among us. That love is not confined to church buildings. It belongs in the places where we work, in our homes and in our communities. Whether people gather around trees on a construction site or in St Peter's, these celebrations offer a chance to share the joy of Jesus' birth with our communities.

News in brief

Bishop Michael enters the House of Lords

Bishop Michael has been formally introduced to the House of Lords as one of the Church of England's Lords Spiritual. During a special ceremony Bishop Michael took the Oath of Allegiance and was directed to the Bishops' Bench. He will remain Bishop of Bath and Wells alongside his parliamentary duties. He said, "I am deeply honoured to have been called to undertake this responsibility. I look forward to representing the needs and interests of Somerset, sitting as a non-political member who can work with people of all faiths and none, as well as with all political parties."



Helping bring a new perspective

19 year old farmer, Will Sealey, has joined the Parochial Church Council at his local church, St James', Milton Clevedon, becoming the fourth generation of his family to serve on the PCC. Will is hoping to share a younger person's perspective and to encourage other young people get involved in church life. He said, "You meet a lot of different people with a lot of different perspectives, and having the ability to get involved, have your say, and make suggestions and improvements is really important."



60 years of ministry

Cake and bubbles marked a double celebration in the benefice of Holy Trinity, Yeovil, with St Mary Magdalene, Barwick, as the congregation came together to celebrate Howard Gorringe and Sally McConnell's combined 60 years of ministry. Howard has served in a range of licensed ministry roles over the past 40 years, while Sally celebrates 20 years of active ministry since being licensed as a Reader in 2006. Together, they marked six decades of service to their communities.

Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

There is no better gift

By Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells

Anthropologists study human culture. Among their studies is gift exchange – of how within human societies, gifts are given, received and reciprocated. Volumes of academic theory have been about how we give and receive gifts and why. Much more practically, gift exchange is what most of us are engaged in this month. We've the Christmas shopping to be getting on with!

Our tradition of giving and receiving gifts at Christmas lies in the story of the Magi who brought to the infant Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Our practice originated in a desire to reflect in human lives the Magi's story. In the past, this happened on the day after Christmas. That's why it's called Boxing Day.

For many of us, giving and receiving gifts at Christmas is something fraught with feelings of hazard. Have I got the right thing? Have I bought for the right people? Have I spent too much or too little? We know that sinking feeling that happens when someone gives us a gift and we've not got them something to offer in return.

I wonder if our challenge at Christmas is to recalibrate what we think we're about. For look at the Christmas stories and you'll see that carefully calculated reciprocity isn't their concern at all. Rather what happens is that people receive the gift of Jesus and it turns their world upside down. The shepherds experience outright glory, joy and wonder. The Magi offer homage. They give to the infant Jesus their very hearts.

For both shepherds and Magi, the result of receiving the gift of Jesus is not that they give back, but that they are sent out. The shepherds make known what has been told to them about the child. All who hear them are amazed. The Magi return to their own country. I doubt they kept their experiences a secret when they got there.

We can't hope to match what Jesus gives us. What we can do is receive the gift of his life, love, joy and wonder and pass it on to our loved ones and the people we meet. There's no better gift we can give than that.

Michael Beasley
Bishop of Bath and Wells



Interview

Angels bringing hope

A year of community events at St Andrew's, Burnham-on-Sea, marks 200 years since its angel carvings arrived at the church. Revd Cheryl Hawkins, Vicar of Burnham, shares how the angels are bringing a message of hope into the parish.



How will the Year of the Angels make Christmas extra special in Burnham?

We'll be thinking of the message that angels bring at Christmas, they bring light, a special message, and they bring love, as well as hope. It's a lovely way of focusing on the hope that Christmas brings.

What role do angels play in the Christmas story?

Angels are present in the Bible; they allow us to engage with our faith. They tell a story of comfort and protection and bring a message of hope — all things that come into the Christmas story, as Jesus said.

What have you planned around angels this Christmas?

We've got knitted angels going out around the parish. Our community carol service will focus on angels, and we'll have quiet time in our services.

Have the angel events helped bring the community together?

We've been blown away by the engagement, really. We had a very limited budget, but it shows the different ways we can engage with people. It's been amazing, and we're hoping that will carry through into Advent and Christmas as well.

What can angels remind us of amid the Christmas rush?

The comfort, protection and message that angels bring are all part of the Christmas story. Having those periods of reflection at Christmas really helps people concentrate on the real message of Christmas.

What do you hope will continue beyond Christmas?

I'm hoping people will realise that St Andrew's is somewhere they can find that quiet space. It's about continuing that message of hope into next year, not just at Christmas, but as we journey forward together.